

Madison County Board of Commissioners

Commissioners

David Schulz

Marilyn Ross

James P. Hart

PO Box 278

Virginia City, MT 59755

e-mail: madco@madison.mt.gov

www.madison.mt.gov

Phone: (406)843-4277

Fax: (406) 843-5517

March 21, 2008

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Though the first few days may not feel like spring is here, there are definite signs, from gophers to blue birds to frost heaves, that assure us that one of those old-fashioned winters, to which many of us were once accustomed, is close to being over. Time seems to slip away quickly through our harried schedules, so again it's been awhile since you've heard from this office. We'll try to fill in some of the high spots, while understanding that even that will be long.

Now is the opportune time to be even more aware of the brucellosis issue and its relation to bison, elk, and cattle, since all of these animals are in their birthing stages. Obviously, the repercussion to all of us will be negative should the disease spread to cattle, though it appears that industry is attempting to do all that it can to prevent such an occurrence.

The proposed Forest Plan, which includes proposed increased Wilderness in the Beaverhead/Deer Lodge National Forest, has raised some questions from a number of entities, including motorized vehicle users, mountain bikers, snow machine users, cattle and sheep ranchers, timber interests, and even the physically handicapped, to mention only a few. Unless there is an extension to the comment period, however, comments directed to Mark Petroni at the Forest Service in Ennis will not be accepted after March 31.

Bridges are an ongoing topic throughout the County. A recent public discussion was held in Ennis at the First Madison Valley Bank, and more will be held in other towns as we progress. We encourage you to watch for notices in this paper, to check the County website regularly (madco@madison.mt.gov), and to talk with neighbors if you have questions and comments about any bridges in your area. Specifically, plans are ongoing this summer to replace a bridge on the South Boulder, on Bear Creek in the Madison Valley, on Cherry Creek on the Lower Madison near the Flying D, and the Coy Brown Bridge on the Ruby. The Duncan District Oxbow Bridge on the Ruby is proposed in the next couple years. Varney and Blaine Springs bridges are priorities in the next 7-10 years, as are some up Jack Creek in the next few years, each on the Madison side. Parrot Canal bridges, the Gien Bridge, the Rubytown Road Bridge, the Judy Lane Bridge, and the Ewe Lane Bridge are all proposed to be done in the next 5 years.

Obviously, when discussing bridges, roads are brought into the conversation in conjunction. Lifting and putting down fabric on various County roads in all 3 Districts have been done and continue to be a priority as funds are available. Some culverts need replaced, while other low, potential water carrying areas in some roads are being considered for new culverts. Ongoing, yearly plans for putting down Magnesium-Chloride are being scheduled.

Both County Nursing Homes, the Madison Valley Manor and the Tobacco Root Mountains Care Center, are scheduled for structural improvements, pending some assistance from Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and the Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP). TRMCC was built in the 60's and MVM was built in the 70's, so each has some imperative needs. TRMCC has safety issues such as fire suppression and old asbestos tile floors, as well as plumbing and space needs in the kitchen and activities areas, as initial requirements. MVM mostly has current outside structure improvements needed on the roof, walls and windows.

The Ennis/Big Sky Airport is in the works with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) this summer to redo much of the runway and taxiways and to extend the runway approximately 1900 feet. In the meantime, plans for similar improvements are being engineered for the Twin Bridges Airport, hopefully no later than three years away.

The recently formed Madison County Facilities Advisory Committee, presided by committee elected Chairman John Scully, is evaluating staff and records space needs, safety needs, and compliance requirements. After the bond election for a Law & Justice Center was defeated and since the previously mentioned difficulties are still unresolved, a number of people expressed interest in helping to figure how to proceed. As a result, some dedicated individuals from all corners of the County, some with knowledge of the previous project and some with little or no knowledge, are looking at various options within Virginia City and its relative surrounding area, and plan to present their findings to Madison County residents by early to fall.

The recent slow-down in the housing market in the Country has somewhat affected our County in that some subdivision development has slowed also. Nevertheless, the County continues to be a place where people desire to live, so the entire County staff is attempting to be proactive in preparation for those inevitable changes. One such change is the desire by many in the Madison Valley to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages to expanding the current subdivision regulations on streamside protection to include development outside a given subdivision. That process will take quite some time before an ultimate possible implementation, if it is implemented at all. Participation in those discussions is greatly encouraged.

Another possible change is the desire by 3 separate wind energy companies to develop operations in the Norris area. Again, the positive and negative impacts of that development require serious discussion, and everyone is encouraged to be involved and informed.

We'll leave the specifics of Emergency Management and Communications to their periodic public updates, but a couple positive steps have recently been made to improve communications capabilities among and between the Sheriff's dispatch office, Search and Rescue, the Solid Waste Department, and the Road Districts. They are closer to receiving funding for improvements to the repeater site on the Virginia Hill, which will benefit all departments in need of radio communications. Keep your fingers crossed. Also, the Search and Rescue, which cooperates in both valleys, has been given \$14,000 to purchase needed radios. That money was designated for specific use through PILT (payment in lieu of taxes) and SRSCSDA (Secure Rural Schools & Community Self-Determination Act) payment to the County. As a side note, unless SRSCSDA federal funding can be attached to a war supplemental bill, it is in serious consideration for no longer being available after FY 2008, something we are trying to keep from occurring.

As can be seen, Madison County faces a myriad of issues, and those "briefly" mentioned here are the most prominent. We thank you all for your continued interest, involvement and support in relation to all these very important concerns for Madison County.